

6 Questions for Statists by Stefan Molyneux

INTRODUCTION: THE SIX QUESTIONS

When considering statist objections to anarchic solutions, the six questions below are most useful.

1. Does the government actually solve the problem in question?

People often say that government courts “solve” the problem of injustice. However, these courts can take many years to render a verdict – and cost the plaintiff and defendant hundreds of thousands of dollars or more. Government courts are also used to harass and intimidate, creating a “chilling effect” for unpopular opinions or groups.

Thus I find it essential to question the embedded premises of statism:

- Do State armies actually defend citizens?
- Does State policing actually protect private property?
- Does State welfare actually solve the problem of poverty?
- Does the war on drugs actually solve the problem of addiction and crime?
- Do State prisons actually rehabilitate prisoners and reduce crime?

It can be very tempting to fall into the trap of thinking that the existing statist approach is actually a solution – but I try to avoid taking that for granted, since it is so rarely the case.

2. Can the criticism of the anarchic solution be equally applied to the statist solution?

One of the most common objections to a stateless society is the fear that a political monopoly could somehow emerge from a free market of competing justice agencies. In other words, anarchism is rejected because it contains the mere possibility of political monopoly. However, if political monopoly is such a terrible evil, then a statist society – which is founded on just such a political monopoly – must be rejected even more firmly, just as we would always choose the mere possibility of cancer over actually having cancer.

3. Is anarchy accepted as a core value in non political spheres?

In my last book, “Everyday Anarchy,” I pointed out the numerous spheres in society where anarchy is both valued and defended, such as dating, career choices, education and so on. If anarchy is dismissed as “bad” overall, then it also must be “bad” in these other spheres as well. Unless the person criticizing anarchy is willing to advocate for a Ministry of Dating, the value of anarchy in certain spheres must at least be recognized. Thus anarchy cannot be rejected as an overall negative – and its admitted value and productivity must at least be accepted as potentially valuable in other spheres as well.

4. Would the person advocating statism perform State functions himself?

Most of us recognize and accept the right to use violence in an extremity of self-defense. Those who support statism recognize that, in this realm, State police merely formalize a right that everyone already has, namely the right of self-defense. A policeman can use force to protect a citizen from being attacked, just as that citizen can use force himself. However, if someone argues that it is moral to use force to take money from people to pay for public schools, would he be willing to use this force himself? Would he be willing to go door to door with a gun to extract money for public schools? Would he be willing to extend this right to everyone in society? If not, then he has created two opposing ethical categories – the State police, to whom this use of violence is moral – and everyone else, to whom this use of violence is immoral. How can these opposing moral categories be justified?

5. Can something be both voluntary and coercive at the same time?

Everyone recognizes that an act cannot be both “rape” and “lovemaking” simultaneously. Rape requires force, because the victim is unwilling; lovemaking does not. Because no action can be both voluntary and coercive at the same time, statists cannot appeal to the principle of “voluntarism” when defending the violence of the State. Statists cannot say that we “agree” to be taxed, and then say that taxation must be

coercive. If we agree to taxation, the coercion is unnecessary – if we do not agree to taxation, then we are coerced against our will.

6. Does political organization change human nature?

If people care enough about the poor to vote for state welfare programs, then they will care enough about the poor to fund private charities. If people care enough about the uneducated to vote for state schools, they will care enough to donate to private schools. Removing the State does not fundamentally alter human nature. The benevolence and wisdom that democracy relies on will not be magically transformed into cold selfishness the moment that the State ends. Statism relies on maturity and benevolence on the part of the voters, the politicians, and government workers. If this maturity and benevolence is not present, the State is a mere brutal tyranny, and must be abolished. If the majority of people are mature and benevolent – as I believe – then the State is an unnecessary overhead, and far too prone to violent injustices to be allowed to continue. In other words, people cannot be called “virtuous” only when it serves the statist argument, and then “selfish” when it does not.

There are a number of other principles, which are more specific to particular circumstances, but the six described above will show up repeatedly.

We will now take a quick tour through an overview of anarchism, and sketch in broad strokes the beginnings of our solutions to the horrors of worldwide violence.